

# THE PRECEDENTED TIMES

## CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF A POST-GROWTH EUROPE

EDITORIAL



Image: FoE Europe

May 2033 marks a decade since the European Union launched its landmark **Beyond Growth Pact**.

We on the editorial team went to the informal anniversary celebration outside the European Parliament in Brussels to talk to citizens on how their life has changed since the EU formally adopted its "post-growth" policy package.

Since May 2023, outdated GDP indicators have been replaced with indicators based on public health, levels of economic equality, standard of living and the state of nature and the climate. Expanding indicators beyond GDP was the starting point of the Beyond Growth Pact, which has transformed policymaking culture led to a package of cross-sectoral laws focused on the wellbeing of people and planet, rather than the profit of big industry.

"Our practise used to be overwhelmed with the patients coming in for symptoms of stress, burnout and insomnia. That has dropped significantly and we're able to channel more funds and time on research and prevention," said Sofia Janssens, a nurse at a Brussels clinic.

"I'm here with my kids on a Tuesday," said Alain de Smet, cleaner and father of three. "That would have been impossible before the package guaranteed Universal Basic Services for all citizens - before, I was working 60 hours a week just to keep us afloat."

Environmental NGO worker Lidia Rodriguez said: "Our climate advocacy work is no longer in constant crisis management mode. Phasing out an economy based on mass production and hyper-globalisation has slashed emissions and we can now work on actively improving the state of the climate, not just avoiding the worst."

[Ct'd on page 5]

# POST-GROWTH: THE NEWS IN BRIEF

## FUTURE GENERATIONS LAW TRANSFORMS LIFE ON SPANISH ISLANDS

In April 2023, the Balearics Islands Parliament became one of the first governments to approve a "Law of Rights for Future Generations" to enshrine the rights of current and future generations. Ten years on, that Commission has transformed life for citizens of the Balearics.

To make it possible for younger people to thrive in their communities, in 2026 house prices and rent costs were capped for local people. Coupled with the promise of a minimum income guarantee, proposed last year, record numbers of islanders aged 21-30 are choosing to remain living in their communities.

Protecting the rights of future generations also means protecting the natural environment, and resources. In 2025, The Commission declared common stewardship of freshwater sources in the Balearics.

The Balearic Islands Parliament gained fame around the world for its successes, and it has played a key role in convincing the EU to follow suit.



Image: Teresa Fernandez / Unsplash

## GERMANY PROVES SUCCESS OF CITIZENS ASSEMBLY

In summer 2021, 160 randomly selected German citizens participated in a Citizens Assembly focused on climate policies, and made a set of concrete recommendations to the Bundestag and the Federal Government.

The momentum around the European Parliament conference in 2023 encouraged Germany to accelerate the implementation of all the proposed policies.

Germany became the first country to compel air travel tickets to reflect their true climate cost, a move which transformed the global aviation industry. Air travel is down 45% to and from Germany compared to 2023, while rail travel has increased 48%.

"It's beyond doubt now that Citizens Assemblies are a great way to design policy," said Member of Parliament Hans Jutner. "The impact of these climate policies has made it clear that Citizen Assemblies should be used in all policy areas, so we have implemented this practice across the Bundestag."



Image: FoE Slovenia

## SLOVENIA SECURES UNIVERSAL BASIC SERVICES

In 2021, 86% of Slovenians voted against privatising the banks and shorelines of waterways in a landslide win for water, nature and democracy.

A few years after that, a massive campaign launched by civil society, including trade unions in Central and Eastern Europe, renewed the push against privatisation and for Universal Basic Services. A "re-municipalisation wave" began, with local public authorities reclaiming the ownership, operation, management and provision of public services that had been privatised.

Six years on, the majority of sectors in those countries are in public or commons' hands, including water, waste, energy, transport, education, housing, school catering, healthcare and social work. This halved both inequality and of resource consumption, and doubled levels of citizen wellbeing. More countries and regions in Europe and beyond are now following suit.

# TALKING TO... European Commission President

## Erica Martin

### *The woman behind the era-defining EU Beyond Growth Pact*



Image: Mikhail Nilov/Unsplash

**You must have faced a lot of resistance in the neoliberal institution that the EU was back then?**

**Martin:** Well, politics is all about building coalitions, so I was never alone. It was key to realise that letting go of economic growth as the only option was beneficial for far more than environmental policy.

We quickly got farmers on our side, who understood that relocalised food chains, fair prices and less industrial production methods would benefit them. There was support from the trade unions who knew addressing worker exploitation and an increasing pay gap meant tackling the common cause. The overwhelmed health sector was ringing the alarm bell and supported us. So, it was getting citizens collectively building this common idea that enabled the transition rather than individuals or industry.

**Degrowth was still a rather niche topic in the early stages of your political career. What happened for it to become common sense like it is today?**

**Martin:** Attitudes and beliefs about the necessity of growth are largely ideological. Each era has its own Zeitgeist. In the early 2000s, the buzzwords were "globalisation" and "good governance" and in the 2010s everyone was talking about "green growth" and "sustainable development".

At the same time, I also noticed that I wasn't acting according to my internal values of people and planet over profit. Providing people with an alternative way of living and governing at the right time is crucial. In the 2020s a tipping point was reached and the scaffold collapsed when a critical mass of individuals let go of myths. The rest is history.

**You are a celebrated champion for your contribution to the Beyond Growth Pact that you initiated as European Commission President in 2024. Do you feel like a hero?**

**Martin:** [laughs] Am I a hero? That is for others to decide. My mandate at the time was to steer the European Union out of a poly-crisis with rising inequality, dwindling social cohesion, and ecological breakdown. The Commission before us initiated the European Green Deal, but many realised that this was simply not enough.

Fundamentally rethinking how we organise our economy was the only credible way to combine both a socially just transition and be serious about our climate targets. We laid the foundations for it at the European Parliament's Beyond Growth Conference in 2023 and through growing public momentum, we could ride a wave that was already unfolding.

Fundamentally rethinking how we organise our economy seemed to be the only credible way to combine both a socially just policy and be serious about our climate targets.



Image: Hinweise zur Weiternutzung

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

15 May 2023 - As political leaders gather for a second conference at the European Parliament on how to move "beyond growth", we, the undersigned academics and civil society organisations, see the geopolitical crisis as an opportunity to disengage from the socially and ecologically harmful growth competition and instead embrace a wellbeing cooperation.

There is no empirical basis indicating that it is possible to globally and sufficiently decouple economic growth from environmental pressures. The pursuit of endless economic growth by high income nations is a problem as it either reduces or cancels the outcomes of environmental policies. The current climate chaos and unraveling web of life on which our society depends is an existential threat to peace, water and food security, and democracy.

Advancing to a post-growth economy is not only to survive, but also to thrive. This calls for a democratically planned and equitable downscaling of production and consumption, sometimes referred to as 'degrowth', in those countries that overshoot their ecological resources. This is Europe's global peace project, because its current economic growth is causing conflicts both in and beyond Europe.

In the context of high-income nations, a smaller footprint does not mean worse living conditions. Sufficiency policies focusing on frugality, resource reduction, and work time reduction can significantly increase wellbeing and decrease environmental pressures, therefore creating the possibility for sustainable prosperity without growth. In order to ensure the highest quality of life with the lowest footprint, we must completely change the goals and rules of the economic game. In a post-growth economy, the current focus on quantitative growth would be replaced by the aim of thriving in a regenerative and distributive economy, one that delivers qualitative wellbeing by meeting the needs of all people within the means of the living planet - as elaborated in the framework of Doughnut Economics.

The markets have proven to be ill-equipped to make the most crucial decisions in our society. For the economy to serve the people, rather than the other way around, people must be given back control over the economy. To change the rules of the game, we need to learn from already existing initiatives. For example, upscaling across the EU the model for not-for-profit cooperatives.

In light of these pressing challenges and stimulating opportunities, we call on the European Union, its Institutions, and Member States to implement:

**1. Post-growth European Institutions:** constitute permanent structures at the Commission, the Council, the Parliament, and within Member States to assess post-growth strategies and pathways.

**2. A European Green Deal beyond growth:** design a new flagship programme shaped around a systemic change approach that aspires to create a thriving future within planetary boundaries, with degrowth as a necessary transition phase towards a post-growth destination.

**3. Beyond growth policies based on the four principles of:**

- **Biocapacity:** fossil fuel phase-outs, limits to raw material extraction and nature protection and restoration measures for healthy and resilient soils, forests, marine and other ecosystems. E.g., a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, a Resource Justice and Resilience Act including a binding material footprint reduction target and real, area-based nature restoration.

- **Fairness:** fiscal instruments to foster a more equal society by eradicating income and wealth extremes, as well as super-profits. E.g., a carbon wealth tax, both minimum and maximum incomes.

- **Wellbeing for all:** secured access to essential infrastructures via an improved, ecologically-sensitive welfare state. E.g., Universal Basic Services (including the human rights to health, transport, care, housing, education and social protection etc.), job guarantees, price controls for essential goods and services.

- **Active democracy:** citizen assemblies with mandates to formulate socially acceptable sufficiency strategies and strengthen policies based on ecological limits, fairness and wellbeing for all and a stronger role for trade unions. E.g., local needs forum, climate conventions, participatory budgeting.

Within civil society and academia, growth-critical ideas have been getting ever stronger. The details of these ideas are being discussed in the European Parliament and with the European Commission right now. Scientific knowledge and policy insights are available to make the ideas of degrowth and post-growth a reality. The crises we face are also opportunities to create a new system that can secure wellbeing for all while allowing for a thriving democratic life and a slower yet sweeter mode of living.

**Signed by over 400 academics and civil society groups**

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ARCHIVES:  
MAY 2023